Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

INDEX

WORKSHOP FOCUSES ON NUTRITION AND MANAGEMENT FOR ORGANIC BEEF 07-48-202

MAXIMUM VALUE FROM EQUINE HEALTH FUNDING 07-48-203

NEW PRICING STRATEGY FOR MUSTARD CAPITAL INC. ... 07-48-204

FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT FOR BEEF PRODUCERS MADE SIMPLE 07-48-205

RECORD YEAR FOR OAT PRODUCTION 07-48-206

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WORKSHOP FOCUSES ON NUTRITION AND MANAGEMENT FOR ORGANIC BEEF

"Better Beef – Better Returns" is a workshop that is designed to assist organic beef producers with returns on their cattle by optimizing nutritional performance and improving management decisions.

Craig Klemmer, a Livestock Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), says the workshop will give organic livestock producers tools and instruction, allowing participants to take home the material and apply it to their own agricultural operation.

The course will be separated into two sections. The first part will cover nutrition balancing, while the second segment will focus on management.

Nutrition balancing will address the issues of creating a balanced ration, allowing producers to maximize the performance of their cattle based upon the available feedstock. Cattle owners will be able to compare different rations so that they can determine the best gain and return from the feed.

Instructors will address the importance of producers knowing their individual costs of production. Using management calculators, producers will determine their cost per pound of gain, including all overhead and operating costs associated with cattle production.

"I would highly recommend that organic producers feeding cattle in Saskatchewan enrol in this course," Klemmer said. "They will receive a lot of good information that will allow them to improve both the animal and financial health of their operations."

The course will be offered in Saskatoon on January 18 to 20 at the University of Saskatchewan, and in Yorkton on January 23 to 24 at the Parkland Regional College. Registration is $575 per person, which includes all class material, software and follow-up support. It is a Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) registered course, and limited space is available at both locations, so producers are encouraged to sign up early.

Registration forms are available on the SAF website at www.agriculture.gov.sk, or by calling the Agriculture Knowledge Centre 1-866-457-2377.

(more)

- 30 -

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MAXIMUM VALUE FROM EQUINE HEALTH FUNDING

Equine health research is getting a major boost with the latest funding from the Equine Health Research Fund (EHRF) to the University of Saskatchewan's Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM).

The EHRF is providing $225,000 to several research and training programs at the college. It is the single largest annual amount ever awarded by the 30-year-old fund. The investment will be used in three major areas, according to Dr. Norman Rawlings, WCVM's associate dean of research.

"The fund is supporting three of our residents," Rawlings said. "They are veterinary graduates who have come back to do specialized training in some aspect of equine medicine or surgery. They are tomorrow's specialists and researchers."

In addition to the training component, the funding will also be used for research projects that are aimed at increasing knowledge of equine medicine.

"The faculty members apply for the funds, and an external committee composed of people from other colleges reviews the applications," Rawlings said. "They would be projects to do with fertility and management of reproduction, orthopaedic surgery, and several in the area of infectious diseases and immunology."

Another important aspect of the WCVM research effort is the fellowships offered to undergraduate students.

"Last year, we had some 43 undergraduates working in the college, in a laboratory, with a professor, on some sort of research project do with veterinary medicine," said Rawlings. "We see this as a means of getting students interested in research and graduate studies when they leave the college."

The Equine Health Research Fund has helped the WCVM become a national centre for horse health research and specialized training. It has resulted in the training of many equine specialists who are working in clinics across Western Canada.

"The reason this fund was set up was to foster equine research with the WCVM," Rawlings noted. "We regard this as start-up money for research projects, but we encourage faculty to go outside and look for other sources of funding once they get rolling."

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The EHRF is administered by the college, but is entirely dependent on grants and donations from outside the university.

"We get donations from horse clubs, individual owners, clinicians and some of the racing associations, as well as the endowment which makes grants from its interest earnings," Rawlings said. "We have a standing offer of $100,000 in grants from a private foundation over the next four years if we can find a matching amount from other sources. So we are always looking for participants in this two-for-one campaign, and we welcome new supporters."

There is always information on the activities of the Equine Health Research Fund in the college's *Horse Health Lines* magazine. Anyone interested can also find more on the WCVM website, at www.wcvm.research@usask.ca.

- 30 -

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NEW PRICING STRATEGY FOR MUSTARD CAPITAL INC.

Mustard producers now have the option of choosing from three new pricing contracts when selling their product to Mustard Capital Inc. (MCI) in Gravelbourg.

The dry mustard mill began operating a few weeks ago, and produces flour, oil and bran products. MCI has created two averaged-priced contracts that will give producers the opportunity to share in the upside of price surges in mustard markets.

"These changes were necessary due to the current volatile market," said Tom Halpenny, CEO and member of the MCI board of directors. "Currently, mustard prices are fluctuating, creating uncertainty."

Haipenny explained the three pricing contract options available to farmers.

The first option allows producers to take a spot price on delivery, which is very similar to what is offered traditionally. The prices offered will fluctuate daily, and if a producer likes the current price, he or she is able to book into a purchase agreement.

The second option allows producers to average the daily prices from the time the contract is signed to July 31 of the crop year in which the average is calculated, with delivery based on MCI's call.

The third option allows producers to select one of four 60-day pricing and delivery periods beginning on December 1, 2007, with price averaging during that time frame and guaranteed delivery.

Halpenny says the new pricing options give producers the opportunity and flexibility to participate in future price rallies. "Producers are able to lock in a minimum price, which would be paid at the time of delivery," he noted. "Then, we pay the amount owing if the average is greater than the minimum price. This process allows producers upside potential if the market increases, with no downside risk."

Yellow mustard has topped 40 cents per pound this fall. For producers who think the rally will continue, the price averaging contracts will be enticing. MCI hopes these options will attract long-term suppliers who will provide the company with the stability it needs in the tough international market for food ingredients.

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Halpenny stated that MCI has recognized two deciding factors with respect to pricing options. "We want to secure our supply, but we recognize that producers want to extract as much value as they can from the marketplace. Our pricing options match these objectives," he said.

For the averaging options, the minimum price is paid at the time of delivery, with the amount owing being paid within 10 days at the end of the averaging period. Average price is calculated using Stat Publishing's daily posted price, which is the average of five brokers' daily spot prices.

All of the contract options include paid storage from the time the producer signs an agreement until the time of delivery.

The volatile prices in the mustard market are the result of decreased supply. Although mustard acres in Western Canada were up this year, production was average when combined with the carry-over from last year.

Production from this year still leaves less supply than was available last year at this time. As well, production declined in eastern Europe, further decreasing supply. Consequently, with limited supply, prices are trending higher.

More information regarding pricing contract options can be obtained by contacting MCI at (306) 648-2799.

- 30 -

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FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT FOR BEEF PRODUCERS MADE SIMPLE

Cattle producers have the tools and the know-how to prepare their cattle for market free of drug residues, thanks to the practices outlined in the Quality Starts Here/Verified Beef Production (VBP) program.

"The program provides the latest knowledge to assess and improve on-farm food safety," said Jodie Horvath, Provincial Co-ordinator for VBP in Saskatchewan. "It helps cattle producers keep up to date with good production practices in their operations, and supports improved efficiency."

The Verified Beef Production program manual outlines standard operating procedures on the use of animal health products, medicated feed and water, control of pesticides, and cattle shipping.

A key recommendation is that producers keep a permanent record of all individual and group medical treatments of their herd. The record should include details such as date, animal identification, product used, route of administration, withdrawal time, and who administered the treatment.

"The manual provides sample records to help you get started," Horvath said. "Animal identification is a must-do step in order to clearly link the animal with its treatment or vaccination record throughout the duration of its withdrawal period. Group or pen identification can be used in the case of group treatments."

Another important record-keeping practice is to double-check that all drug withdrawal requirements have been met before cattle are shipped to slaughter or to the next owner. The manual suggests that treatment records should be initialled once the producer has verified the withdrawal date.

Producers can avoid some potential issues by taking simple steps, such as storing their animal health products according to label instructions, which normally means avoiding extreme cold or heat. It is also important to make sure that syringes and other equipment deliver the intended amount of product.

"Sometimes we see producers using treatments in ways that are not in keeping with product labelling," Horvath noted. "This so-called 'extra-label use' includes use on species or under conditions not listed on the label, using different dosages than specified, or using the treatment via an inappropriate route, frequency or duration."

The VBP requires that, in cases of extra-label use, there must be a vet prescription for the treatment. This prescription should include withdrawal times appropriate to the product's use.

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The manual also deals with "what-if" situations that may arise.

"For example, if a needle breaks, you need to identify the animal and record the incident in a permanent record," Horvath stated. "The next owner must be notified. Or, if the wrong product is administered or if the dose is wrong, you should contact your vet and record it to make sure the animal meets its withdrawal time before shipping for slaughter."

At this time of year, it is common for cull cows to be shipped if they have turned up open during pregnancy checks. Concerns can arise if they have been given health products in the two-month period prior to shipping.

"Some of the common topical treatments for parasite control require a 49-day withdrawal period before slaughter," said Horvath. "Separating the culls from the rest of your cows before treating the herd is an easy way to avoid any accidental treatments."

Producers can learn more about these procedures and the manual at Verified Beef Production program workshops, which will be scheduled at various locations this fall and winter.

"The workshops last about two hours, and include time to go through the manual and discuss its requirements with qualified VBP trainers," said Horvath. "I welcome questions about the program from anyone who wants more information."

- 30 -

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